# To match or not to match? Voice, concordancing and textmatching in doctoral writing

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**Abstract**
Appropriate use and acknowledgement of sources continues to be a central concern of academic integrity. A major challenge for research student in this is the development of a confident authorial voice which matches disciplinary expectations in language use, yet manages to do so without plagiarising through inappropriate text matching or recycling of language. This is a daunting challenge for all research writers, particularly for English as an Additional Language (EAL) researchers who are still grappling with English grammar and syntax. In order to develop novice research writers' understanding of acceptable use of sources and mastery of disciplinary language, we have developed a process that uses concordancing software alongside Turnitin. Here we present textual analyses of two cases using this process: in one, the student's percentage of matches decreased as he developed his authorial voice; in the second, the percentage of matches actually increased as the student's language choices came to reflect more closely the expectations of the discipline.

## Introduction

Appropriate use and acknowledgement of sources continues to be a central concern of academic integrity. However, this involves far more than avoiding plagiarism and patchwriting (Howard 1995; Pennycook 1996; Pecorari 2003; McGowan 2008); sources also contain the disciplinary and academic language that writers must necessarily use. Thus novice research writers are forced to navigate a complex set of contradictory expectations before achieving a confident authorial voice. On one hand, they must make an original contribution in their "own words" and their own voice (Stolley & Brizee 2010); on the other hand, they are required to acknowledge previous research using the standardized, highly formulaic language of their disciplinary discourse community. That is, they must "be original, but not too original" (Picard & Guerin 2011). Most novice research writers find this challenging, but it is particularly difficult for those English as an Additional Language (EAL) researchers who are not yet entirely confident or comfortable in manipulating English grammar and syntax. In order to develop novice research writers' understanding of acceptable use of sources and mastery of disciplinary language, we have developed a process called "Try it on" that uses concordancing software alongside Turnitin.

In this paper we present textual analyses of two cases where research students used Turnitin in conjunction with concordancers to develop an appropriate voice in academic writing. In the first case the student's percentage of matches decreased as he developed his "authorial presence" (Zhao & Llosa 2008, p159) and disciplinary and "situational voice" (Ede in Hirvela & Belcher 2001, p89). In the second case, the percentage of matches actually increased as the student's language choices came to reflect more closely the expectations of the discipline.

**To match or not to match?**

For many novice research writers, the difficulty lies in knowing how much text needs to match (to meet disciplinary/academic expectations) and how much is too much (that constitutes plagiarism). We demonstrate how Turnitin plus concordancers can illuminate this distinction for EAL research students who are in the process of discovering how to write in their own "voice" within the conventional language use of their discipline. The notion of voice, though, is a slippery one, and requires some exploration and explication.

**Voice**

Discussions of voice tend to fall into two general categories: those that focus on voice as self-representation and expression of identity (see, for example, Gale 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999; Flowerdew 2000; Hirvela & Belcher 2001; Thompson 2005; Matsuda & Tardy 2007; Grobman 2009); and those that focus on the linguistic and rhetorical strategies mobilised to create authorial voice in a text (see, for example, Ivanic & Camps 2001; Harwood 2005; Zhao & Llosa 2008; Taş 2010; Chang & Schleppegrell 2011). For our purposes it is the intersection of these approaches that is of interest in terms of supporting doctoral candidates in their writing practices, and that allows us to explore how identity is constituted in writing (Aitchison 2009, 2012; Caffarella & Barnett 2000; Lee & Boud 2003; Boud & Lee 2005; Kamler & Thomson 2008; Baker & Lattuca 2010; Catterall et al. 2011). Indeed, it is precisely in order to highlight the academic identity or "academicity" (Petersen 2007) that is coming into being during doctoral writing that we draw students' attention to the concept of voice.

For all its imprecision as a term (DiPardo et al. 2011), we choose to evoke the notion of voice because "as a metaphor [voice] has to do with feeling-hearing-sensing a person behind the written words, even if that person is just a persona created for a particular text or a certain reading" (Bowden 1999 quoted in Hirvela & Belcher, 2001, p. 85). That is, it helps our students to notice this aspect of writing that requires them to adopt a particular identity or persona for a given situation (in this case, thesis writing). In their influential paper on mature EAL writers learning to write "academese" (Fox 1994 quoted in Hirvela & Belcher 2001), Hirvela and Belcher (2001, p89) take up Ede's (1992) concept of the "situational voice", investigating how writers adopt difference voices for different texts and purposes, much as they might put on different outfits for different occasions. A related metaphor is employed by Ivanic and Camps (2001, p21), who posit that the choices of "voice types" available in academic writing are pre-determined by the "disciplinary discourse communities they are entering, like second-hand clothes waiting to be selected and given new life when worn by someone new". Academic writing, then, can be understood as an act not only of putting on different outfits to suit particular occasions, but also of choosing that outfit from a selection of second-hand clothes that have been worn by academics before us. The value of these metaphors lies in their capacity to draw our attention to the ways in which academic texts borrow and recycle language, bringing together our concerns here with both voice and plagiarism.

**How is voice constituted in the text?**
Ivanic and Camps (2001, p11) map out a detailed framework to explain the concept of voice by building on systemic functional linguistics, delineating between ideational, interpersonal and textual positionings of the authorial voice and articulating the linguistic realisations of each of these categories. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that "voice" is created out of all the enormous range of language choices made in writing any given text – vocabulary, verb tenses, modality, evaluation, linking, references to other texts and individuals (whether general or specific), classification and structuring of information, and choice of pronouns.

In an attempt to pin this down in a manner that could be effectively used to assess voice in student writing, Helms-Park & Stapleton (2003) developed a "Voice intensity rating scale". Working from this, Zhao & Llosa (2008) assess four main components of voice in their study – "assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of central point, and authorial presence and autonomy of thought" (p160):

1. assertiveness – hedging language, intensifiers;
2. self-identification – pronoun use, active voice;
3. reiteration of central point – frequency and explicitness of presentation of central ideas; and
4. authorial presence and autonomy of thought – presentation of alternative viewpoints, and "reader's impression of the overall authorial presence in a particular piece of writing".

As students start to make progress in developing their own voices, this can provide a relatively straight forward focus for examining this aspect of their writing.

Most importantly for our purposes is an awareness of the relationship between author, text and reader. Our EAL students soon discover that their readers and discourse communities can hold "rigid prohibitions against allowing different voices using nonconventional and nonnative forms of language and rhetoric..." (Cho 2009, p50). Attempts to publish or submit theses for examination in those "different voices" are rarely accepted on their own terms. While one might well be troubled by the politics and power relations this implies, we would argue that we still owe it to our students to help them understand the conventions in order for them to make informed decisions about how they choose to present their writing. There are certainly examples of successful manipulation of new and different voices in academic writing (see, for example, Viete & Ha 2007), but this is a complex and often risky business. In terms of the clothing metaphor outlined above, this might be equivalent to wearing a ball gown and tiara to a small, informal academic seminar – beautiful undoubtedly, but sending a rather different message about one's purpose from the jeans and shirt more usually adopted for the occasion.

Alongside this unreceptiveness to different voices, Ivanic and Camps (2001, p31) remind us that academic writing is in fact a "creative recombination of voices" and as academic developers we can harness this for our students' benefit: "Learner-writers can discuss the aspects of voices they encounter in source texts that they

would like to adopt and those they would like to avoid...the role of source texts in learning to write can be acknowledged and used creatively rather than dismissed with the moral outrage associated with 'plagiarism'". Thus, it is through a focus on voice that students can develop aspects of their writing that in turn allow them to participate effectively in their disciplinary and discourse communities.

**Why does voice matter?**

Although many doctoral candidates take a considerable length of time to develop an appropriate academic voice in their writing, this is an even greater hurdle for EAL students. Selection of the appropriate levels of formality and assertiveness, of signposting of central ideas in the argument, of jargon and technical terms, of authority is not always obvious or transparent and requires experience and experimentation. Getting this right is crucial, however, in that it facilitates access to a desirable identity as a legitimate member of the targeted discourse community (Flowerdew 2000; Cho 2009). Ivanic and Camps (2001, p31) explain that, "For those learning to write in a second language, there may be a double demand for critical awareness: firstly, recognizing the extent to which the voice types supported by the new language are culturally acceptable or culturally alien to them, and secondly, recognizing differences between voice types associated with the range of genres and discourses to which they are exposed in the new culture."

These challenges are borne out in the study by Hirvela and Belcher (2001), which recognises the importance of existing authorial voices in "mature multilingual writers". Their subjects are much like our EAL research students, who also find themselves in a situation where they are expected to adopt new identities that can in fact be at odds with the self they have previously successfully represented in their academic writing in other languages. For example, as a lecturer in their home country, they presented their ideas with ease and authority to a student audience, but now as doctoral candidates they are expected to justify themselves to examiners; or their previous suitably deferential attitude towards established experts is suddenly regarded as lacking in critical awareness and judgement. These kinds of difficulties in establishing the appropriate academic voice can be particularly irksome when it comes to writing the discussion and analysis sections of the doctoral thesis (Bitchener & Basturkmen 2006). Thus, EAL research students frequently need direct instruction in how to write about their discipline and their research within the field in ways that match examiners' and reviewers' expectations. Concordancers can be harnessed in particular ways to aid this instruction.

**Concordancers**

Corpus study was originally used by English for Academic Purposes teachers to explicate lexical and grammatical patterns, and more recently it has been used in direct explorations of disciplinary language patterns (Cargill & Adams 2005; Cheng 2008; Conroy 2010; Yoon 2011). In highly specialised fields corpora need to be tailor-made for the precise discipline (Lee & Swales 2006). For novice writers working towards an appropriate academic voice, corpora and concordancers can provide an invaluable source of information about idiomatic or disciplinary use of English. This is particularly important for EAL writers seeking to enter discourse communities that

are unsympathetic to the "different voices" mentioned above. At the same time, these writers need to develop a better understanding of the appropriate (that is, unplagiarised) recycling of language elements in the sources they employ. As Eira (2005) has demonstrated, research writers are engaged in a process of "obligatory intertextuality". The challenge lies in knowing just how much text needs to match (to meet disciplinary/academic expectations) and how much is too much (that constitutes plagiarism).

Interestingly, corpora study also allows for insights into new uses of language that are in the process of gaining acceptability. For example, Cargill (2011) demonstrates how an EAL writer can determine the legitimacy of the word "evolvement". Using the Springer Exemplar, she shows that there are indeed other authors who have used "evolvement", but that there are only 12 instances in the entire corpus, 9 of which come from Chinese sources, 1 from India, 1 from Japan, 1 from Canada, and 1 from the US. We would be fairly safe in saying that most (if not all) of these examples are not generated by "native speakers" (itself a complicated notion), and that the nearly 5000 examples of "evolution" would be more likely to be well received by readers.

**Our Process – "Try it on"**

In preparing ways for our students to learn how to work with disciplinary voices, we are guided by the principles of "learner autonomy" and "scaffolded learning". Learner autonomy is well established as an important element of language learning (Palfreyman & Smith 2003), and is closely linked to other kinds of independence required of the doctoral candidates we work with. However, such autonomy requires initial nurturing if it is to prove robust. A scaffolded approach to writing instruction has been demonstrated as effective for university students in academic English language programs (see, for example, Cotteral & Cohen 2003), even at doctoral level (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). In breaking down the steps and working with students at each stage, the expectations and requirements of academic writing can be more easily understood, integrated into the writing produced, and later applied in new situations. Together, these approaches provide guided steps towards independent research writing.

To provide a scaffolded approach to encouraging learner autonomy in research writing, we have developed a process that uses Turnitin in conjunction with concordancers to help EAL research students develop an appropriate "voice" in academic writing. At present it is tentatively known as "Try it on", reminding us of the range of matching choices and their recyclability (as well as the persona/clothing being tested out to see how it looks and feels). Below is a brief summary of the process we have described in detail elsewhere (Picard & Guerin 2011).

*Step 1: Text matching*

Writers run their text through plagiarism detection software (e.g. Turnitin), and then categorise the text matches according to type (see Table 1). The document is revised in response to these decisions. For most students, some initial guidance in

this process is useful as they learn to interpret the Turnitin report. Most importantly, they need to understand that the actual percentage match is not the issue; rather, it is the kind of match that is significant.

| | |
|---|---|
| too close | the text is too similar to the source and needs to be paraphrased or rewritten |
| not relevant | some other text has been highlighted, e.g., a formula or a bibliographic reference |
| discipline-specific phrase | this is the way that concept must be expressed in this context |
| unsure | anything else the student does not know how to categorise |

**Table 1. Textmatch categories** (Picard & Guerin, 2011, p228)

It is the last category, "Unsure", that is taken to the next step where the concordancer programs come into play.

*Step 2: Concordancing*
Writers can use an existing corpus (a body of works) such as Springer Exemplar, or create their own corpus using the articles they have cited in their literature reviews. In the latter situation, students will also need to download concordancer software such as ConcApp or AdTAT (the latter is a freeware program we have developed at Adelaide University). Students then search the corpus for instances of the phrases that have been identified as unoriginal by Turnitin but which they suspect are legitimately recycled (that is, they might be discipline-specific terms or standard academic expressions). If the phrase appears a number of times, it is likely that, rather than constituting plagiarism, it is the accepted language used by the discipline. On the contrary, if it appears only once, it may indeed be a case of plagiarism.

**Developing authorial voice**
In what follows, we present two examples of how "Try it on" can be used to respond to different kinds of text matching issues. In the first, there is too little sense of the student's own voice; in the second, there is too little sense of the required disciplinary language.

*Student 1. Too much matching = 48%*
The first situation involves a student who exhibits the common errors that result from patchwriting and poor note-taking, in which large chunks of text are copied directly from the source document and there is very little of the author's own contribution to the discussion. The major challenge here is to create a sense of authority in the writing through developing the student's own voice; that is, the

student must be encouraged to offer confident opinions and critical assessments of the published ideas, to present themselves as a researcher entering into dialogue with the discipline. In Zhao and Llosa's (2008) terms listed above, these elements draw on the first of their categories (assertiveness) and the fourth (authorial presence and autonomy of thought).

For this particular student, the first attempt at preparing a doctoral research proposal resulted in a 48% match in the Turnitin report, 26% of which was attributed to one article which served as the basis for establishing the research gap to be filled by the doctoral project. However, the other 22% comprised a range of matches to academic publications. (In some other cases we have seen a considerable percentage of matches to student papers on unrelated topics which our students have clearly never read. In such cases, the matches are to standard academic phrases of the kind taught to EAL students in English for Academic Purposes classes.)

In establishing the research gap, this student relied heavily on a single text that was reproduced in the initial research proposal with only minimal changes or interventions from the student's voice. A major task was for the student to consider what precisely he himself needed to take from this article, and to interweave the voices from other texts as well into the discussion. The revised text reduced the match to this particular article from an initial 26% to 6%. While still far from ideal, the student is gradually developing an ability to organise his own ideas about the field and to comment on the material presented, as well as going to the original sources, rather than simply copying what the main article had to say about these other studies.

| 48% matched text with Turnitin<br>– entire paragraph copied | 16% matched text with Turnitin<br>– student's own voice starting to appear |
|---|---|
| *Ishima et al. (1993a) studied the effect of particle residence time in the layer on dispersion. Three different size classes (42, 72 and 135 um glass beads) were injected in to the gas flow at varying relative particle velocity for change their residence time within the layer. Particle concentration was measured by recording the rate of particles passing through ten LDA measurement volume. The results indicate that increased relative velocity reduces the effect of the large scale vortices on the particles due to smaller residence time within the vortex. Increasing the relative velocity was seen to have the same effect on dispersion as increasing the particle size which led to a modified Stokes number based on a fluid time scale, which* | Ishima et al. (1993a) shows that<br>*the effect of large scale vortices*<br>decreases because of increased relative velocity of particles and<br>*smaller residence time within the vortex.*<br>At this context,<br>*particle concentration was assessed by the data of particle passing through an LDA measurement volume.*<br>Modified Stokes number was described from increased particle size which is the effect on particle dispersion derived from increased relative velocity. This modified Stokes number was defined on the basis of<br>*a fluid time scale, which includes both the standard fluid time scale,*<br>and characteristic residence time… |

| | |
|---|---|
| *includes both the standard fluid time scale …* | |

**Table 2. Text matches for Student 1**
Italics represents text match highlighted by the Turnitin report. Underlined text draws attention to copied text remaining from the first report.

The left-hand column shows the text copied directly from one source that summarises the experiment performed in another study (that is, taken from the literature review of the key article). In the right-hand column we see that the student has now sought out the paper for himself, and has gleaned from it the points that are relevant to his own discussion. Unnecessary detail has now been eliminated, and the student has digested the material and integrated it into his own argument. The remaining matches are sometimes to disciplinary language confirmed through a concordancer search (e.g., "fluid time scale"), but some remain too close to the original text to be acceptable. Clearly the student still has some distance to go before he is writing in a confident and appropriate academic voice, but we can at least see progress here.

*Student 2. Too original = 0%*
The second story is that of an EAL doctoral student whose first attempt at writing a research proposal resulted in a 0% matching report from Turnitin. While this might be possible, even desirable, in some disciplines, such a report in many STEM disciplines requires some investigation. It is highly likely that the text is in fact "too original" in that it does not use the idiomatic phrases and terms one would expect in standard academic writing. As Pecorari (2009, p102) reminds us: "one of the reasons why lexical bundles are of practical interest is that they are part of fluent, native-like expression, and are therefore an important aspect of language learning." Without matching or recycling these phrases, the writing can become awkward, even inaccurate.

In this instance, an academic developer worked with the student and supervisor to identify expression that did not meet the norms of the discipline. While the text displayed the components of voice outlined by the "Voice intensity rating scale" (Helms-Park & Stapleton 2003; Zhao & Llosa 2008), there was still a significant amount of work to be done in terms of vocabulary choices, word forms, verb tenses and phrasing. Examples of the kinds of errors are presented in the table below.

| **2% match with Turnitin** | **13% match with Turnitin** | **Reason for match** |
|---|---|---|
| There are different types of T effector cells. | To date, different types of T helper cells have been described | *Correct noun has now resulted in a match* |
| | | |
| The differentiation of the T cell takes place in the thymus | The *differentiation of the T cell begins* in the thymus. | *Correct verb has now resulted in a match* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| And any defect in the Th2 cell type leads to atopic asthma and allergy. IL4 is majorly responsible for Th2 differentiation. | And any defect in theTh2 cell type leads to asthma and allergy[ref]. ... The cytokines TGF-β, IL6, IL-21 *and IL-23 play a major role in the differentiation* of naive T helper cells into Th17 cells. | *Idiomatic term has now resulted in a match* |
| | | |
| CD40L is highly expressed in these cells. CD40L activates, proliferates and differentiates B cells. | CD40L which is highly expressed on these cells help in the activation, *proliferation and differentiation of B cells.* | *Nominalisation has resulted in a match* |

**Table 3. Text matches for Student 2**
Italics in middle column represents text match highlighted by the Turnitin report. Underlined text draws attention to altered text from the first report leading to text match.

Throughout the document a range of inappropriate word choices were identified and rectified, including wrong verb or noun, unidiomatic phrases, and use of verbs rather than nominalised forms. The outcome was a revised text that more closely matched the expectations of the academic discipline and recycled the language that demonstrated the writer's developing identity as a member of the target discourse community. Thus, the student's voice as a "legitimate peripheral" (Lave & Wenger 1991) member of the disciplinary community is gradually coming into being.

**Conclusion**
When we say we are concerned with students developing their own voices in writing as a way to avoid plagiarism, this can be understood as their process of developing a greater sense of confidence and authority in the persona they create in the text. We would argue that this as just as much a matter of learning how closely they need to resemble the standard expectations of their discipline, as it is a matter of finding new words and phrases to express their ideas. Thus, it is a process of learning to distinguish between the elements of writing that are available for recycling and those which are not; which items of clothing are available from the second-hand rack, and those which are out of bounds.

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